

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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FM AMCONSUL LAHORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0020

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL KARACHI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: PUNJAB POLITICAL CRISIS

REF: LAHORE 0748

BEGIN SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO REMAINED IN LAHORE AND WORKED TO DEFUSE PUNJAB POLITICAL CRISIS, CAUSING SOME TO PREDICT THAT PPP INTERNAL HARMONY WOULD BE RESTORED WITHOUT EXPULSION OF KHAR. MAY 22 SESSION AT PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY WAS SCENE OF FLASHING TEMPERS AND FIST FIGHT, BUT KHAR UNEXPECTEDLY STAYED AWAY FROM MAY 23 SESSION, WHICH WAS TAME AFFAIR. FACT THAT HE HAD LENGTHY TALKS WITH BHUTTO AFTERNOON MAY 22 CONVINCED SEVERAL OBSERVERS THAT KHAR WAS COMING AROUND TO SEE PRIME MINISTER'S VIEWPOINT. IN MEANTIME, LOCAL GRAPE-VINE HAS IT THAT SOME OF KHAR'S FRIENDS ARE DESERTING HIM, FURTHER ISOLATING HARDHEADED FORMER CHIEF MINISTER, AND IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THAT HE CAN REMAIN IN PPP. END SUMMARY

1. IN MOVE DESIGNED TO FORESTALL FURTHER SPECULATION, PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE ISSUED PRESS STATEMENT MAY 22 SAYING BHUTTO HAD ORIGINALLY PLANNED TO REMAIN IN LAHORE
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"FOR A NUMBER OF DAYS." PM'S SPOKESMAN ADDED THAT

EXACT DATE OF DEPARTURE WOULD BE ANNOUNCED LATER, BUT THAT BHUTTO WAS "ADHERING TO HIS ORIGINAL SCHEDULE." MEANWHILE, PRIME MINISTER HAS BEEN HOLDING SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH VARIOUS PPP POLITICIANS, SINGLY AND IN GROUPS. HE SAW KHAR ALONE AFTERNOON MAY 22, AND INFORMED SPECULATION IN CITY IS THAT AT LEAST ONE, AND PERHAPS SEVERAL MORE MEETINGS ARE IN CARDS. THIS HAS CAUSED SEVERAL POLITICAL OBSERVERS (INCLUDING PRESS) TO PRECICT THAT BHUTTO'S SUASION WILL WORK TO RESTORE PROVINCIAL PPP INTERNAL HARMONY. KHAR'S RELATIVES TOLD ME EVENING MAY 23 THAT THEY THOUGHT PPP SQUABBLE COULD BE RESOLVED WITHOUT HIS EXPULSION FROM PARTY (BUT I DOUBT IT; SEE COMMENT).

2. DURING MAY 22 PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY SESSION, PPP MPA SARWAR JAURA ROSE ON POINT OF PRIVILEGE TO COMPLAIN THAT PRESS HAD "DISHONESTLY" REPORTED THAT HE HAD SIDED WITH KHAR GROUP IN VOTE MAY 21. BOTH KHAR AND DEPUTY LEADER OF OPPOSITION PROTESTED LOUDLY, AND AFTER TUMULTUOUS SHOUTING MATCH, DEPUTY LEADER AND JAURA ENGAGED BRIEFLY IN FISTFIGHT BEFORE SPEAKER ADJOURNED SESSION AND CALMED MELEE. FULL CONTINGENTS FROM ALL SIDES WERE PRESENT AT SESSION AND TEMPERs WERE HIGH, LEADING TO RUSH ON SECRETARY'S OFFICE FOR TICKETS TO WHAT PROMISED TO BE SHOWDOWN MAY 23.

3. HOWEVER, KHAR UNEXPECTEDLY FAILED TO APPEAR DURING MAY 23 SESSION, AND GOVERNMENT SEATS WERE HALF EMPTY, WHICH INDICATED TO MANY OBSERVERS THAT DEAL WAS BEING WORKED OUT BETWEEN BHUTTO AND KHAR, AND THAT THEIR MAY 22 MEETING HAD BEGUN TO BRING LATTER AROUND. DEBATE ON MAY 21 ADJOURNMENT MOTION CONCERNING GHEE WAS DESULTORY, AND ENTIRE SESSION WAS TAME AFFAIR. (ONLY REMARK OF NOTE CAME FROM CHIEF MINISTER RAMAY, WHO ANNOUNCED THAT ARMY UNITS WOULD ASSIST RANGERS IN PATROLLING BORDER IN EFFORT TO CHECK SMUGGLING TO INDIA.)

4. MEANWHILE, LOCAL GRAPEVINE IS BUZZING WITH RUMOR THAT SOME OF KHAR'S POLITICAL ALLIES ARE BEGINNING TO DESERT HIM. THERE IS GENERAL IMPRESSION IN LAHORE THAT HE GOT NO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SUCCOR FROM HIS FISHING EXPEDITION IN SIND, AND NO MORE PUNJAB POLITICIANS HAVE BEEN NOTICED JOINING HIS CAMP. ONE OF OUR CONTACTS MAINTAINED THAT "REAL" EXPLANATION FOR KHAR'S NON-APPEARANCE AT MAY 23 ASSEMBLY SESSION WAS THAT HE COULD MUSTER ONLY 6 OF HIS ORIGINAL 10 SUPPORTERS, AND DECIDED TO STAY AWAY. TWO OF HIS CLOSE FRIENDS TOLD ME MAY 22 THAT THEY HAD TRIED TO TALK SENSE INTO THE "HARDHEADED, IMMATURE KID," BUT THAT HE HAD REFUSED TO

LISTEN AND WAS BEING "LED ASTRAY BY HIS MORONIC SYCOPHANTS."
EVEN KHAR'S NORMALLY BLUSTERING FATHER-IN-LAW INDICATED
TO ME MAY 23 THAT HE HOPED SON-IN-LAW WOULD LISTEN TO REASON
FROM PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO.

5. COMMENT: WHETHER BHUTTO IS SLOWLY BRINGING KHAR
AROUND, OR WHETHER HE IS CAREFULLY PEELING AWAY FROM HIM
HIS CLOSEST ALLIES, IS NOT YET CLEAR. HOWEVER, FACT
THAT PRIME MINISTER HAS DECIDED TO REMAIN IN LAHORE FOR
FURTHER INDEFINITE PERIOD INDICATES THAT HE IS DETERMINED
TO NAIL DOWN SITUATION MORE FIRMLY THAN HE DID IN PREVIOUS
VISITS. WHERE KHAR WILL END UP IS ALSO UNCLEAR, BUT IT
SEEMS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT PUNJAB PPP COULD SURVIVE HIS
RETENTION, EVEN IF HE MADE EMBARRASSING PUBLIC APOLOGY
OR IF BHUTTO ANNOUNCED ANOTHER RECONCILIATION. IF BHUTTO
REMAINS AS ASTUTE AS HE HAS BEEN IN PAST, IT IS PROBABLE
THAT KHAR WILL EITHER LEAVE PUNJAB PPP OR TAKE UP ASSIGN-
MENT ABROAD.
GRIFFIN

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